Freda Graham Bundy,
Cowley, Alberta.

8

Alberta's an Early Pioneer Wm. Gladstone

~~First Permanent~~ White Settler ~~of Alberta~~

by

Freda Graham Bundy,
Cowley, Alta.

The first real old-timer of Alberta was William Gladstone and from an old file of a now obsolete newspaper, "The Rocky Mountain Echo", we read a bit of early Canadian history in his diary.

William Gladstone's father emigrated from Berwick-on-Tweed, Scotland, in the summer of 1832 and made his home in Montreal where young William was born. The latter went to school in the village of Lachine until he was thirteen years of age, then after having tried his hand at a number of things, he bound himself to the service of the Hudson Bay Company at the rate of ten pounds sterling for the first two years, twelve pounds for the next two and fifteen for the last year.

In a graphic manner Gladstone describes his work at Norway House and at various company posts in what is now Alberta. Life was not a bed of roses for this young lad and he ~~tells of~~ records many hardships ~~that~~ he endured during those first few years in the North-West Territories.

For instance - "That night was bitterly cold and I froze my feet badly. An old man at camp made me keep my feet in the water hole all night. I suffered a great deal but I believe the heroic remedy saved my feet."

Often the ~~boats~~ York boat brigades from far-off York Factory did not get in, supplies ran low and slim rations were the order of the day. In one place in the diary, he states - "They allowed us three drachms of rum a day and gave us plenty of pemmican and frozen potatoes". Then again - "Before August we killed

and ate 25 dogs for want of other food. We used to make what we called 'rab-a-bo', by mixing flour with pemmican and boiling it with water in a large kettle. When finished, it looked like soup and we ate it with a spoon."

Within the next few years it was his privilege to meet many persons whose names became famous in early Canadian history. In the meantime, young Gladstone had proved his ability as a carpenter and his work was generally in the shipyard of the various forts that were situated near the water. He mentions meeting Rev.Thos.Rundle and speaks frequently of Father Lacombe and a Methodist missionary,Thos.Wolsely.

An entry reads, "Father Lacombe who was just about to start for his mission at St.Albert, offered to share his supply of food with me in return for making his doors and windows. " And again,he says, " I went to Smoky Lake to build the mission for Mr.Wolsely." In fact, according to records, most of the first buildings in Alberta were erected by William Gladstone.

There were many,many times from 1848 - 1870 that the prairies and foothill country of Alberta,were alive with game and many instances are cited in the diary. ~~He writes~~ - "The country was swarming with rabbits" he writes and that night our party killed 75 of them .... elk were plentiful and that winter we killed over 600 of those beautiful animals. Elk meat is not nearly so good to eat as buffalo meat. It was a great country for game at that time and we killed plenty of deer and antelope.

" I saw thousands of buffalo. A big herd is a sight never to be forgotten, In motion it is a sea of heaving backs and tossing tails and horns. One day I saw the Indians drive 800 buffalo into a huge pound -- we filled two sleighs with buffalo tongues, over 1,000 in all and each of our fifty-odd sleighs was loaded with half a ton of choice meat. They never let us have any of the tongues to eat, they were too much of a delicacy and commanded a big price over the water. I think we

salted nearly 2,000 of them at Rocky Mountain House that winter."

He records an interesting bit of history ~~who~~ - " This summer (1860), an expedition from England came to Edmonton to report on the country and its possibilities. Among the company was a Captain Palliser, Dr.Hector,Mr.Sullivan,Captain Blackistone and a French botanist. They had a large outfit of carts with them which they left with us while they were exploring about the country. They did not let a flower or a fly or an insect escape their spectacles and their nets. The collection of bugs and plants that they made would have filled a museum... Soon after we got settled Capt.Palliser's party came back and spent the winter with us so that life was not as lonely as usual. Dr.Hector had a good stock of books some of which he lent me. We used to have many a chat together and grew to be great friends."

No doubt, William Gladstone was able to give this party valuable information concerning the Indians, wild animals and the like, for when Palliser's party came through, Gladstone had been in the country twelve years and had travelled north,south,east and west. By this time he spoke Cree,Blackfoot,French and English.

Two years later, he met the noted missionary,George McDougall and speaks of him in a highly laudatory manner. "September, 1862, Rev.George McDougall, with his son, came to Smoky Lake to choose the location for his mission which he called Victoria. Mr.McDougall had to go to Norway House and bring back his family. He set off in a small boat with two Indians. He is made of the right stuff for a western missionary. Not many ministers would care to attempt a 1,000-mile trip with only a couple of Indians but he was a bold man who feared neither danger nor hardship. He was a good hunter and handled an axe like a trained woodsman. I was accounted a handy man with an axe myself, but it was all I could do to hold my own with George McDougall."

Gladstone gave a number of graphic descriptions of the quarrels

between the various tribes of Indians. The Hudson's Bay Company knew how to manage them, for in the early part of the diary is this statement - " The Company always treated the Indians well and we did not have any trouble with them for seven or eight years." Then they commenced to go bad, thanks to the white strangers who came among them to corrupt their morals and their manners. It was the first time I had heard the war-whoop! "Hei! Yei! Hei! Yei!" and it made the shivers run up and down my back ... I saw 300 Indians drunk on rum at one time. It was a wild and woolly sight and Sure made my hair rise."

Not all the hunters in this new country were Indians and trappers. Gladstone tells of several who came from the Old Country to hunt big game and he tells of a certain Frenchman. "A French count had come from France to hunt mountain sheep - he arrived with a big outfit and also brought a game-keeper, a valet-de-chambre and fifteen men with him to look after his high and mighty comfort! And no less than ten carts to carry the 'necessaries'. About the last of August the French count came back. He was delighted with the result - 25 mountain sheep, 3 grizzly bears and a great deal of other game."

Parties were not always so fortunate in securing game, for Gladstone recalls a trip he and the factor, Mr. Moberly, made. It nearly ended disastrously for when they were travelling on this way to Edmonton they were overtaken by a severe snow storm. To make matters worse, they ran short of food. "All we had to eat for the next eight days was a rabbit and a big owl. That owl might possibly have been in its prime at the time of the American Revolution. I am willing to bet that it was over 100 years old. We boiled it all night and next morning, Mr.Moberly tried to divide it for us. He hacked away for an hour without success and then with a sigh remarked that it couldn't be helped. Even the dogs couldn't make an impression on that owl."

This seems to contradict the idea that game was always plentiful

and was to be had for the killing.Gladstone tells of trading forts running short of food, Indian tribes wandering and starving at times, and even after he was married, he recalls - "Our grub was gone and for two weeks we lived on soup that my wife made from the bark of the cottonwood tree ."

Rich gold strikes were being made at Fort Edmonton and Fort Benton and, like many other young men at that time, Gladstone was anxious to be at the scene of activity. A few years earlier he had taken up land to become one of the West's first farmers, much to the disgust of the Hudson's Bay Company factors. Finally, he sold his farm equipment to Father Lacombe and headed for Fort Benton.

Arriving there he found that he could obtain $10 a day as carpenter and promptly forgot about gold mining. He gives a thrilling description of this notorious town of the early days. The noisy wildness did not suit him, and back to Alberta he came, this time to help construct barracks for the North-West Mounted Police at Fort Macleod.

He remained there for years, acting as chief carpenter for Macleod, then went to Mountain Mill, south of Pincher Creek where he hand-whipped timber. Many of the pioneer homes of the south country were built by William Gladstone, and, as time aged and mellowed him, he was content to spend many hours telling of his early life and adventures, many of which were recorded in the now defunct "Rocky Mountain Echo".